

CLAIMS

1. A method of contacting a destination terminal from an originating terminal via a packet-based communications network which comprises a plurality of terminals connected to a plurality of gateways and further comprising a gatekeeper, said gatekeeper having information about each gateway comprising an identifier for each terminal connected to that gateway and said method comprising the steps of:-

(i) sending a request from an originating gateway connected to the originating terminal to the gatekeeper, said request comprising the identifier of the destination terminal;

(ii) receiving a reply at the originating gateway from the gatekeeper said reply comprising information about at least one and possibly more of the gateways which can be contacted to reach the destination terminal.

2. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said communications network comprises a first zone and a second zone each comprising a plurality of terminals connected to a plurality of gateways and wherein a plurality of the terminal identifiers of the first zone are also used for terminals of the second zone.

3. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein said reply comprises information about only one gateway which is in the same zone as the originating terminal.

4. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein a unique label is assigned to each gateway.

5. A method as claimed in claim 4 said gatekeeper has information about the unique label of each gateway.

6. A method as claimed in claim 4 wherein said request further comprises the unique label of the originating gateway.

7. A method as claimed in claim 5 wherein said reply comprises information provided by the gatekeeper on the basis of the unique label of the originating gateway as well as the destination terminal identifier.

8. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein if the destination terminal identifier occurs in both zones, the reply received specifies that a gateway in the originating zone should be contacted.

5 9. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein the first zone is associated with a first enterprise and a second zone is associated with a second enterprise.

10 10. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the identifiers are of a type selected from telephone numbers, universal resource identifiers (URLs), email addresses or any other suitable type of H.323 standard alias.

11. A method as claimed in claim 4 wherein the unique labels comprise any suitable type of H.323 standard alias.

12. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the request is an H.323 admission request.

15 13. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the reply is an H.323 admission confirm message.

14. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein each gateway is unaware of which terminals are connected to other gateways in the communications network.

20 15. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said gatekeeper further comprises information about which terminals are accessible from each gateway together with cost information associated with accessing those terminals from each gateway.

25 16. A method as claimed in claim 15 wherein said reply comprises information about each gateway that can be used to access the destination terminal together with associated cost information.

17. A method as claimed in claim 16 wherein said reply comprises a list of said gateways in order of the associated costs.

30 18. A gatekeeper arranged for use in a packet-based communications network comprising a plurality of terminals connected to a plurality of gateways and wherein identifiers are associated with each terminal, said gatekeeper comprising:-

(i) a memory arranged to store information about each gateway in the communications network said information comprising the identifier of each terminal connected to each gateway;

(ii) an input arranged to receive a request from a gateway in the communications network, said request comprising an identifier of a destination terminal;

(iii) an output arranged to send a reply to the requesting gateway, said reply comprising information about at least one and possibly more gateways which can be contacted to reach the destination terminal.

19. A gatekeeper as claimed in claim 18 wherein said memory is further arranged to store cost information relating to the cost of accessing each available terminal from each gateway.

20. A gatekeeper as claimed in claim 18 wherein a unique label is assigned to each gateway and wherein said memory is arranged to store the unique label of each gateway.

21. A gatekeeper as claimed in claim 20 wherein said request further comprises the unique label of the originating gateway connected to the originating terminal.

22. A gateway arranged for use in a packet-based communications network comprising a plurality of terminals connected either to the gateway or to second gateways and wherein identifiers are associated with each terminal, said communications network further comprising a gatekeeper having information about each gateway comprising an identifier for each terminal connected to that gateway, said gateway comprising:-

(i) a processor arranged to issue a request to the gatekeeper, said request comprising an identifier of a destination terminal;

(ii) an input arranged to receive a reply from the gatekeeper, said reply comprising information about at least one and possibly more of the second gateways which can be contacted to reach the destination terminal.

23. A gateway as claimed in claim 22 wherein said request comprises a unique label which is associated with the gateway.

24. A gateway as claimed in claim 22 wherein said reply comprises cost information.

5 25. A communications network comprising a gateway as claimed in claim 22.

26. A communications network comprising a gatekeeper as claimed in claim 18.

10 27. A computer program for controlling a gatekeeper which is arranged for use in a packet-based communications network comprising a plurality of terminals connected to a plurality of gateways and wherein identifiers are associated with each terminal, said computer program being arranged to control said gatekeeper such that:-

15 (i) information is stored about each gateway in the communications network said information comprising the identifier of each terminal connected to each gateway;

(ii) requests are received from gateways in the communications network, said requests comprising an identifier of a destination terminal; and

20 (iii) a reply is sent to the requesting gateway, said reply comprising information about at least one and possibly more gateways which can be contacted to reach the destination terminal.

25 28. A computer program for controlling a gateway in order to contact a destination terminal from an originating terminal via a packet-based communications network which comprises a plurality of terminals connected either to the gateway or to second gateways and further comprising a gatekeeper, said gatekeeper having information about each gateway comprising an identifier for each terminal connected to that gateway, said computer program being arranged to control the gateway such that:-

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(i) a request is sent from the gateway to the gatekeeper, said request comprising the identifier of the destination terminal;

(ii) a reply is received at the gateway from the gatekeeper said reply comprising information about one and possibly more of the second gateways which can be contacted to reach the destination terminal.